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## ABSTRACT

Noting that recent descriptions of "political correctness" give multiculturalism a negative connotation, this paper explores the role of intercultural communication in a re-considered 1990s view of multicultural education and discusses the design of a conceivable short course that will serve as the foundation for increasing teacher/student intercultural confidence. The paper notes that multicultural education is making enormous progress, and that one course where multicultural education principles can be embraced is intercultural communication. The paper then discusses a 3-hour experiential-based teacher/student intercultural confidence building short course that will focus upon individualism/collectivism to help the teacher/student participants to perceive classroom diversity as an asset rather than a dreaded liability. The short course proposed in the paper will include a brief lecture followed by the participants (professors, graduate students, and secondary school professionals attending a Central States Communication Association conference) crafting classroom scenarios which they will then role-play and follow-up with analysis and evaluation of the communication that occurred. Contains 35 references. (RS)

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# Intercultural Confidence Building for the Speech Communication

Teacher/Student: A Conceivable Short Course

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# Intercultural Confidence Building for the Speech Communication

## Teacher/Student: A Conceivable Short Course

### Introduction

The phrase "politically correct" means different things to different people. Thibodaux (1992) cites a 1992 Britannica World Data Annual that conceptualizes the late 80s view of "political correctness" as "a pejorative term to describe a loose collection of feminists, Marxists, multiculturalists, and deconstructionists together with their assorted left-wing positions on race, sexual orientation, gender class, the environment, and related issues" (p. 12). Such an insulting depiction of "political correctness" gives multiculturalism and other "left-wing positions" a negative connotation.

"Left-wing positions" do lack an authentic understanding of intended purpose but these positions do not lack significance. In particular, if educators do not understand the genuine goals of multicultural education, students will experience a serious disservice. Furthermore, given the demographic changes in our current U. S. classrooms (Fuchs, 1994), multicultural education more than ever needs to be re-considered (Banks, 1993b; Singer 1994). This paper explores the role of intercultural communication in a re-considered 90's view of multicultural education and furthermore uses some theoretical frameworks to design a conceivable three hour short course that will serve as the foundation for increasing teacher/student intercultural confidence.

Multicultural Education Re-Examined and Intercultural  
Communication's Contribution to the Multicultural Movement

Education. Isocrates (1990) writes that "[t]hrough this [the power to persuade each other] we educate the ignorant and appraise the wise; for the power to speak well is taken as the surest index of a sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul" (p. 50). Isocrates's view of education places a strong emphasis on what Rubin & Henzl (1984) label communication competence. While "communication competence" initially sounds innocent, it is a classic example of Sumner's (1940) view of "ethocentrism" (p. 13). There is a strong implication that a "competent" speaker embodies a "right" or desirable way to communicate. On the other hand, if a person embodies a "wrong" or different from the mainstream way to communicate, he or she due to some cultural standard is perceived negatively and starts to constitute a minority status. As a member of a minority microculture, the student must decide to assimilate with the dominant culture or to maintain his or her own distinctness.

The decision to assimilate or to remain different is not easy. Educated students must be encouraged (empowered) to make their own decisions. Giroux & McLaren (1986) call for a critical education that empowers all students. These authors write:

[Empowerment refers] to the process whereby students acquire the means to critically appropriate knowledge existing

outside of their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live. . . . But empowerment means more than self-confirmation. It also refers to the process by which students are able to interrogate and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving, the wider social order" (p. 229).

Being questioned is education's mission to enculturate people without violating basic human rights or destroying self-esteem.

Multicultural education. Multiculturalism is a movement that began during the early 70s. Like other elusive abstractions, e.g., "communication" and "culture," multicultural education is very difficult to operationalize. According to an article entitled "No One Model American" crafted by the Commission on Multicultural Education (1973):

Multicultural education is education which values cultural pluralism. Multicultural education rejects the view that schools should seek to melt away cultural differences or the view that schools should merely tolerate cultural pluralism. Instead, multicultural education affirms that schools should be oriented toward the cultural enrichment of all children and youth through programs rooted to the preservation and extension of cultural alternatives.

Multicultural education recognizes cultural diversity as a fact of life in American society, and it affirms that this cultural diversity is a valuable resource that should be preserved and extended. It affirms that major education institutions should strive to preserve and enhance cultural pluralism (p. 264).

The American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education was one of the premier organizations to adopt multiculturalism and in so doing was a leader in embracing cultural pluralism. According to the National Coalition for Cultural Pluralism,

[Cultural pluralism is] a state of equal co-existence in a mutually supportive relationship within the boundaries or framework of one nation of people of diverse cultures with significantly different patterns or beliefs, behavior, color, and in many cases with different languages. To achieve cultural pluralism, there must be unity with diversity. Each person must be aware of and secure in his [or her] own identity, and be willing to extend to others the same respect and rights that he [or she] expects to enjoy himself [or herself] (see Sleeter & Grant, 1988, p. 140).

Essentially, cultural pluralism from the 90's perspective encourages teachers to caress equality, to encourage separate but compatible cultures, and to reverence diversity.

While the meaning of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism seem unmistakable, a debate over these

constructs has been launched (Adams & Hamm, 1991; Etzioni, 1991; Feuer, 1991; Yarbrough, 1992). Much of the debate centers around semantic "intensional agreement" (Johnson, 1946, p. 512).

According to Banks (1993a), the following are three misconceptions that people opposed to multiculturalism launch:

(1) "Multicultural education is for the others;" (2)

"Multicultural education will divide the nation;" and (3)

"Multicultural education is opposed to Western tradition" (pp. 22-23). On the other hand, the Commission on Multicultural

Education (1973) indicates that cultural pluralism should advocate the following four objectives: "(1) the teaching of values which support cultural diversity and individual uniqueness, (2) the encouragement of the qualitative expansion of existing ethnic cultures and their incorporation into mainstream American socioeconomic and political life, (3) the support of explorations in alternative and emerging life styles, and (4) the encouragement of multiculturalism, multilingualism, and multidialectism (p. 264).

Hunter (1973), a proponent of multiculturalism, emphasizes that cultural pluralism and multiculturalism should eliminate the "melting pot" metaphor and replace such a metaphor with one that reflects a separate but equal status. He endorses the idea that the American people as a whole is greater than the individual fractions. He asserts that Americans "constitute a unique whole in their combinations, interactions, interrelations, and cohesiveness" (p. 262). Through a natural

science metaphor he continues his thinking by noting that "no pure societal 'atom' loses its identity, the recognition for what is it, even though it contributes to the existence of the all-encompassing molecular substance" (p. 262).

In her attempt to dispel some of the frustration and disagreement over multicultural education, Marshall (1994) offers four misconceptions that educators and students should be cognizant of as they attempt to celebrate diversity. The four misconceptions that she addresses deal with the following: (1) the belief that if the teacher only taught students from his or her own background, there would be no need to learn about multicultural education, (2) if multicultural education is embraced, the teacher will not be teaching only about the mainstream culture but every culture must be representative, (3) the idea that if the teacher understood how "those people learned," the teacher could teach them the school's curriculum, and (4) the idea that because one is from a particular culture, he or she is an indisputable spokesperson for everything about his or her particular culture (see Locke, 1992). If these misconceptions go unrecognized, multicultural education will continue to receive a negative connotation.

Multicultural education through cultural pluralism does not attempt to trap people into particular stereotypes. Cultural pluralism does prize diversity and cultural pluralism does seek to prevent monoculturalism. Bernier & Davis (1973) assert that "[i]f properly implemented, multicultural education not only



can assist individuals in understanding and developing their cultural heritage and/or affinity, but also can provide the community with understandings and empathy needed to transcend cultural and ideological boundaries and assist one another in the struggle to improve their lives" (p. 269). During the three decades since multicultural education was conceptualized, Banks (1993b) reports that despite the strong criticisms, multicultural education is making enormous progress and the movement faces many challenges that will help all Americans. One course where multicultural education principles can be embraced is intercultural communication.

Intercultural communication. Just as multicultural education means different things to different people, intercultural communication is undergoing a similar struggle. In his seminal work on cultural study, Hall (1981) says that "[c]ulture is man's [and woman's] medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economics and government systems are put together and function" (pp. 16-17). Casmir & Asuncion-Lande (1989) criticize Hall's work. They accuse Hall of reducing culture to "the illusion of specificity or definiteness through the assignment of numerical values and measures" (p. 280). Despite their

criticism, Casmir & Asuncion-Lande do credit Hall for laying the foundation for an evolving process of studying culture that still continues.

Casmir & Asuncion-Lande indicate that "[i]ntercultural communication scholars are concerned with understanding what happens when human beings from different cultures meet, interact, and attempt to resolve problems in various interrelationships" (p. 278). For the purpose of this paper, Samovar & Porter's (1995) definition of "intercultural communication" will suffice. Samovar & Porter (1995) write, "[I]ntercultural communication is communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event" (p. 58). The three hour proposed experiential based teacher/student intercultural confidence building short course will focus upon individualism/collectivism and in so doing will help the teacher/student participants to perceive classroom diversity as an asset rather than a dreaded liability.

#### Designing the Teacher Training Intercultural Communication Proposed Short Course

##### Advance planning considerations

Teaching philosophy. The behavioral experimentalists philosophy of education will guide the short course. According to Bigge (1982), behavioral experimentalists view education as a way "to give learners experience in effective experiences so as to develop fundamental intellectual and moral dispositions in students in the forms of desired behavior patterns toward

nature and other people" (p. 157). The short course facilitator will choreograph the learner experiences. A successful short course will embrace holistic learning (Perls, 1971), experiential learning (Dewey, 1938), and cooperative learning groups (Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind, 1991; Doyle, 1986). These three teaching strategies and the behavioral experimentalists' view of education will accomplish two objectives: (1) increase intercultural sensitivity through the individualism/collectivism construct (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992) and (2) empower the learners with confidence to co-create a classroom learning environment that relishes cultural diversity.

Target participants. The proposed short course will include anyone attending a Central States conference. Ideally, the participant demographics will be comprised of professors, graduate teaching assistants, and secondary school professionals. Educators with various years of teaching experience as well as those with less than one year teaching experience are welcome.

#### Conducting the short course

To achieve holistic learning through experience, the cooperative learning groups during the first twenty minutes of orientation will hear a brief lecture on individualism/collectivism (see Yoshida, 1994). The lecture will link short course objectives to the experiential tasks that follow the lecture.

Brislin (1989) warns that "too many lectures and assigned

readings can lead to a dull program" (p. 144; also see Kim & Gudykunst, 1990). Consequently, Brislin encourages intercultural communication program designers to go beyond lectures and to include cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning domains. As a result of these learning domains, he categorizes intercultural communication holistic training programs into nine possible paradigms. Each paradigm differs in the amount of involvement targeted for the three learning domains. For the purpose of this proposed short course, the intercultural training will be based upon what Brislin (1989, p. 413) labels "high involvement aimed at affect."

Taking a phenomenological approach to the question, "What is the nature of teaching?," Reinsmith (1992) perceives teaching as a continuum that ranges from a teacher-centered presentational approach, i.e., teacher as disseminator/transmitter of knowledge, to a student-centered teacher as learner perspective. In the former case, the teacher views students as empty vessels in need of being filled with knowledge whereas in the later case the teachers-students co-create knowledge. The short course facilitator will be a co-learner and he or she will co-create a learning environment conducive to collaborative learning (see Civikly & Muchisky, 1991).

The collaborative learning environment embraces cultural pluralism. Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind (1991), indicate that "[c]ooperative structures create the conditions for reversing inequality, producing egalitarian social structures

and caring relationships where diverse people can work together toward common goals" (p. 165). Following the short lecture on individualism/collectivism, the participants will be asked to craft a classroom scenario where diversity is not embraced. Once the participants have crafted a script for the interaction between classroom participants, the short course participants will be asked to craft another script that depicts the transaction between co-learners in the classroom where diversity is prized.

Once two different scripts have been crafted, the participants will be asked to role play both scripts. Following the role plays, the audience will be asked to analyze and to evaluate the communication that occurred. The participants will experience how it feels to have a teacher-student who is a "hegemonic overlord" (McLaren, 1988, p. 165) and one who is a "liminal servant." Also, the participants will be asked to speculate on some outcomes where the teacher chooses, for whatever reason, to ignore cultural diversity. All participants will be encouraged to brainstorm ways that teachers can build confidence in intercultural communication relations without having to feel like a "cultural expert." The ethics surrounding their suggestions must be addressed. Finally the last twenty minutes of the short course will be used to collect personal narratives from the participants. The personal narratives will ask the participants to reflect upon their experiences in the short course.

## Conclusion

The phrase "political correctness" means different things to different people. One place where political correctness is important is within the U. S. classrooms. Our U. S. classrooms are experiencing numerous demographic changes (Fuchs, 1994), but the teachers might feel neither competent (see Campbell & Farrell, 1992) nor confident enough to savor the demographic changes. The proposed short course is an experiential-holistic learning opportunity designed to increase educator intercultural confidence. Increased student empathy toward individualism/collectivism should lead to more effective multicultural experiences for teachers and students (Randall, Nelson, & Aigner, 1992). Being endorsed is Vivian Gyssin Paley's idea that "It is often hard to learn from people who are just like you. Too much is taken for granted. Homogeneity is fine in a bottle of milk, but in the classroom it diminishes the curiosity that ignites discovery."

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